

We've been militarily involved in the Persian Gulf region now for 20 years. Experts have predicted that the cost of this continuous and expanding war will reach 6 trillion dollars.

The hostilities and our overt involvement in Iraq can be dated back to January 16, 1991, when the defensive Operation Desert Shield became the offensive Operation Desert Storm. Though the end of the Persian Gulf War was declared on April 6, 1991 with a U.S. military victory, the 20 year war was just beginning.

The U.S. and Britain have had an intense interest in controlling the oil of the Middle East dating back to the overthrow of the Ottoman Empire during World War I. This interest expanded during World War II with FDR's promise to protect the puppet governments in the Persian Gulf area, especially Saudi Arabia.

Though this arrangement never set well with the citizens in the region, a fairly decent relationship remained between the Arab people and the American public. But animosity continued to build with our ever present military involvement in Iraq.

Our military assistance to the Mujahedeen in the 1980s (now the Taliban) helped the Muslim defenders—one of whom was Osama bin Laden—oust the Soviets from Afghanistan. At that time we were still not seen as occupiers, and the radical Muslims, encouraged by the U.S., were expected to direct all their efforts toward the Communist threat.

That all changed with the breakup of the Soviet system and the end of the Cold War, when, as the lone superpower left standing, we named ourselves the world policeman.

It was then that the resentment by Arabs and Muslims became directed toward the United States, now seen as an invader and occupier.

Continuous bombing and crippling sanctions against Iraq during the 1990s, the appearance that the U.S. did not care about the plight of the Palestinians, and our military bases in Saudi

Arabia led to attention-getting attacks against the United States: The 1998 embassy attacks in Kenya and Tanzania and the attack on the USS Cole in the year 2000 were warnings that the war was far from over. The horrible tragedy of 9/11 shouldn't have been a surprise and many believe it was preventable.

Currently the war has morphed into a huge battle for control of the Persian Gulf region and central Asia. This involves Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Yemen, Somalia, and Iran.

Foolish policies lead to foolhardy conflicts.

Foolhardy conflicts lead to unsustainable costs and a multitude of unintentional consequences.

To name a few:

1. We have spent trillions of dollars based on the false pretense of defending freedom and our Constitution.
2. It has become more accepted that war no longer needs to be declared by the Congress and can be pursued as a prerogative of the President.
3. We are now seen by the world not as a peacemaker, but rather a trouble maker and aggressor.
4. Thousands of American service members have been killed and tens of thousands wounded, with a sharp increase in service connected suicides.
5. Over 500,000 veterans are seeking medical treatment and disability benefits.

6. Millions of citizens have been killed, wounded, and displaced in the countries on the receiving end of our bombs, drones, sanctions, and occupation.
7. The region has suffered huge environmental damage as a consequence of our military occupation.
8. Christians from Iraq have suffered the worst rout in the history of Christendom.
9. Iran and Iraq are now better allies than ever, with strong anti-American sentiment.
10. Iraqi political stability is a joke.
11. Ending hostilities in Afghanistan is a dream.
12. China and Iran have been drawn into a closer alliance against the U.S.
13. America's uncontrolled deficits are senselessly fueled by needless militarism.
14. We are now much poorer and less safe. There was no al Qaeda in Iraq before we invaded in 2003. Today there is.
15. No WMDs were ever found in Iraq.
16. War always leads to government growth and the sacrifice of civil liberties. In the past

10 years this has been particularly costly to us, with the acceptance of military tribunals, torture, assassinations, abuse of habeas corpus and Patriot Act type legislation.

Senseless war and senseless destruction and death should not be rationalized as providing a great service in protecting our freedoms, our Constitution, or maintaining peace. The only value that can come of this is to recognize that our policies are flawed and they need to be changed. Without this, history will record that the sacrifices were all in vain.

A policy of peace, friendship, and trade is far superior to one of occupation, entangling alliances, and sanctions which guarantee war. We should pursue such a policy for moral reasons. But if we don't, we will nevertheless be forced to change our ways for economic reasons. It's time to bring our troops home.